

Message

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Sent: 4/21/2020 5:55:01 PM
To: Hughes, Hayley [hughes.hayley@epa.gov]; Knott, Steven [Knott.Steven@epa.gov]
Subject: FW: Inside EPA: Reversing Course, EPA Postpones Asbestos Evaluation Review

From: Labbe, Ken <Labbe.Ken@epa.gov>

Sent: Tuesday, April 21, 2020 12:51 PM

To: Bolen, Derrick <bolen.derrick@epa.gov>; Dennis, Allison <Dennis.Allison@epa.gov>; Dunn, Alexandra <dunn.alexandra@epa.gov>; Dunton, Cheryl <Dunton.Cheryl@epa.gov>; Fischer, David <Fischer.David@epa.gov>; Giddings, Daniel <giddings.daniel@epa.gov>; Grable, Melissa <Grable.Melissa@epa.gov>; Hanley, Mary <Hanley.Mary@epa.gov>; Labbe, Ken <Labbe.Ken@epa.gov>; Ortiz, Julia <Ortiz.Julia@epa.gov>; Pierce, Alison <Pierce.Alison@epa.gov>; Siciliano, CarolAnn <Siciliano.CarolAnn@epa.gov>; Sullivan, Melissa <sullivan.melissa@epa.gov>; Tyler, Tom <Tyler.Tom@epa.gov>

Subject: Inside EPA: Reversing Course, EPA Postpones Asbestos Evaluation Review

Reversing Course, EPA Postpones Asbestos Evaluation Review

<https://insideepa.com/daily-news/reversing-course-epa-postpones-asbestos-evaluation-review?s=em2>

EPA has postponed the upcoming meeting of science advisors scheduled to peer review its draft evaluation of asbestos because some of the advisors are no longer available, a change in course just weeks after officials denied requests from environmentalists and its advisors to delay the meeting because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The announcement -- postponing the April 27-30 meeting of its Science Advisory Committee On Chemicals (SACC) -- likely ensures the agency will not be able to meet its June deadline for completing all of the first 10 evaluations of existing chemicals under the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA), though such a milestone was highly unlikely even before the announcement.

"Given the importance of the draft risk evaluation for asbestos, the Agency believes that rescheduling for a time when more members are available is critical and will allow for a more robust review of the evaluation. As a result, the SACC meeting will be rescheduled as soon as practicable," EPA's toxics office said in an April 20 announcement. The decision is not surprising, given that some members of the asbestos peer review panel are medical doctors or public health officials and likely involved in pandemic response.

But when some advisors and the Asbestos Disease Awareness Organization (ADAO) raised this concern last month, EPA officials continued to prepare for the April meeting. "We are delighted the EPA finally listened to the scientific and public health communities and rescheduled the virtual SACC meeting due to the coronavirus pandemic," ADAO President Linda Reinstein said in an April 20 statement. "When the time is right, we look forward to working with experts to submit the scientific evidence for the SACC's review that will undoubtedly lead the EPA to prohibit imports and use of asbestos in the United States."

ADAO has been concerned by the content of the draft evaluation, which excludes legacy uses of asbestos, and some diseases associated with asbestos exposure, such as asbestosis, to focus on mesothelioma and lung cancer.

"EPA has had more than 30 years to study the risk of asbestos, a known carcinogen, and take action," Reinstein's statement says. "Despite this, they are on track to fail Americans again thanks to the deadly exclusions in the draft risk evaluation that will continue to threaten the public."

ADAO officials in a March 30 letter urged Administrator Andrew Wheeler to put the next peer review meeting and associated "public comment on hold until the current crisis is resolved and the scientific and medical community can give the draft evaluation the time and attention it deserves."

Virtual Meeting

The now-postponed meeting was scheduled to be held as a virtual meeting, like SACC's last meeting in March, where panelists peer reviewed the agency's draft evaluation of the common solvent trichloroethylene (TCE). But some panelists raised concerns at that meeting about the viability of conducting peer review remotely and about conducting the asbestos meeting in April.

SACC member Henry Anderson, formerly the chief medical officer for Wisconsin, reminded EPA that SACC members will have their hands full writing the peer review report on TCE. He also said some SACC panelists are medical doctors or public health officials busy with coronavirus response.

"It might be worth ... [discussing] do we really want to move forward [with] a full week [meeting] in April. I wonder if [it would] not be best to postpone for the May dates," Anderson said, apparently referencing dates in May that SACC members have been asked to reserve for another peer review meeting.

Anderson added that "for those of us in the public health field we're in for, in the next month or so, really ramping things up. I'd ask EPA to look at whether it is really critically important to have the next meeting in April?" After Anderson's remarks at the March 27 meeting, SACC Chairman Ken Portier said he would discuss the concern with SACC's EPA liaison. "I've heard [those] comments from a number of members," Portier said.

EPA does not provide further detail on why it chose to postpone the peer review meeting. It does indicate that it "does not anticipate extending the written public comment period on the draft risk evaluation past the June 2, 2020, due date [but] as needs arise EPA will review and respond appropriately."

EPA is working against a June deadline to complete its first 10 evaluations of existing chemicals, as Congress directed in its 2016 overhaul of the 40-year-old TSCA. The June deadline is already a statutorily-allowed six-month extension from TSCA's general three-year deadline for completing such evaluations -- though EPA's toxics chief, Alex Dunn, has acknowledged that for some chemicals those deadlines may slide in order to achieve quality evaluations. The draft evaluation for asbestos represents the ninth of the first 10 that EPA has released for public comment and peer review by SACC. The 10th evaluation, of another common solvent, perchloroethylene, has yet to be released. -- *Maria Hegstad* (mhegstad@iwpnews.com)

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